

16. A Patriarch's first stumblings of Unbelief (2007)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 March 2008

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 0 0] Do turn, if you would, to Genesis chapter 12, and we're looking this morning at the second half of that section, which goes from verse 10 down to the first verse of chapter 13.

Now last week we began on this second part of the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings, chapters 12 to 50. And we saw that it really is the beginning of the Christian faith, and especially as we get later on in the story about the family of Jacob, the family of Israel, it's a story of the beginning of the family of the Christian church.

And it began, as we saw last week, with a pagan's first steps of faith, stepping out of the darkness, of materialism, and the mumbo-jumbo of false religion, into the light and the certainty of the truth of God's powerful revelation.

And I want to emphasize again this morning, first of all, that something that the New Testament makes so clear and so plain, that what we're talking about here, right back in Genesis, is our Christian faith.

There's only one true faith, through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, of course, and it has been so right from the very start. Faith, that is, in the promise and in the fulfillment of God's eternal salvation accomplished through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the fullness of time, when he came in history.

[1 : 3 7] Now for Abraham, of course, as for all of the Old Testament saints, they believed and they trusted in the promised one, in the Christ, who was to come, as God had promised right from the beginning. They looked forward to his coming and to his work.

And of course, we look back on his coming and his work, and we rejoice in that completed work. That's the great privilege that we have, to be born in the end of the ages, as the Bible calls it.

But whether we look back to Christ's coming, or whether we were looking forward with Abraham to Christ's coming, we all look with faith to the same person, the same Christ, the one mediator in whom lies all our hope of salvation.

We share an eternal salvation and a hope for an eternal home. Now again, I'm emphasizing this, because sometimes there's an awful lot of confusion about this, even among Christians.

Some people think, well, of course, the Old Testament hope, well, that was just a temporal thing, a physical thing. It was just about the land of promise.

[2 : 4 7] It was about material rewards and prosperity. Whereas for us, of course, it's quite different. We're hoping for heaven. We're hoping for eternity. But people who think like that are driving a great wedge between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

And really, they're saying that the things that concern the people of old were quite different from ours. And that would make the Old Testament largely irrelevant for most of us today. At least, it would be relevant only in so much as it's seen as preparatory, as it's foreshadowing the coming of the real thing in the New Testament.

But that's quite, quite wrong. At least as far as the New Testament is concerned, it is. Far from it. Abraham and all the Old Testament faithful were seeing far more than that and seeking far more than that.

Far more than the merely earthly. Their faith is our faith. Their hope was for an eternal home. Now, just to get this absolutely clear, I wonder if you'd turn with me to Hebrews chapter 11.

We've quoted from this chapter once or twice already in our studies. But I want us to see that this is something very, very plain on the pages of the New Testament. It's something very important for us to grasp if we're going to have, as Christians, a whole Bible.

[4 : 09] Not just, well, about the one-fifth of it that makes up the New Testament portion. So look at Hebrews 11. If you've got a church Bible, I think it's page 1007. But look at verses 8 to 10.

By faith, we're told, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going. By faith, he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Now, did you notice what Abraham's hope was for?

Not just for the land of Israel, for Canaan or Palestine. No, he only lived there in tents as a foreigner. Because, although it was real and wonderful in the place of God's blessing, he knew that it wasn't the ultimate goal of his faith.

No, he was looking for a permanent city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God himself. Unlike the city of Babel, designed and built by man.

[5 : 23] If you doubt that, look down to verse 13. We're told that all of these acknowledge that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. Earth is not their homeland.

That's what verse 14 says, quite plainly. They're seeking a different homeland. And look at verse 16. Couldn't be plainer, could it? They desire a better country.

That is, a heavenly one. And God, we're told, has prepared for them just such a city. You see, if we take that seriously, we can see it's just not true that the Old Testament faith was any different from ours, in terms of what they trusted and hoped for.

Abraham's faith is our faith. It's real Christian faith. In fact, if you take Hebrews chapter 11 at all seriously, you'll find that Abraham had a far, far better grasp of it than many, many Christians have today.

We're so much, so much taken up, aren't we, with this present world? And it seems, if you read Hebrews chapter 11, far more so than Abraham himself ever was, content just to live in tents, passing through.

[6 : 38] Of course, some Christians today are far, far more taken up with the physical, the geographic, historic land of Israel and Palestine than Abraham himself ever was.

That's something perhaps we need to give some thought to too, as Christians. Whereas Abraham, he saw the future with great clarity. And he set his face firmly towards the eternal city of God, a heavenly country.

And that he would have quite sharp words, I think, for lots of Christians today who are obsessed, in a very strange way, with the land of Israel. But no, the Lord Jesus said of Abraham, listen, John 8, verse 56, Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day.

He saw it and was glad. He saw it from afar. Yes, he did. Hebrews 11, 13 says that. But they did see these things.

And they acknowledged the true faith of God's sure promise. Now, we look back in a different way. We look back and rejoice. We know that through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's promise from the beginning has been fulfilled.

[7 : 53] Everything that he said to Abraham, that all the nations of the world would be blessed through his seed. We've seen it now accomplished in Jesus. And we know that together with us, who have seen that great fulfillment, they also, the saints of old, like Abraham, they also will receive what was promised to them from the start.

That's how Hebrews 11 ends, isn't it? If you just look to the last couple of verses of that chapter, verses 39 and 40. And these things, and all these rather, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us, they should not be made perfect.

God's plan was to make them and us perfect together, in the fulfillment of his promise through Jesus. That's why he goes straight on in Hebrews chapter 12, immediately to say, therefore, since we're surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses, in other words, since their faith is our faith, let us also, like them, run the race that's set before us, looking to our Lord Jesus, not just the author of our faith, but now, through his completed work at Calvary, the guarantee and the perfecter of our faith.

The one who's now seated, he says, in the place of all authority, at the right hand of the throne on high, and will certainly, therefore, without question, lead all who trust in him into that eternal city, that kingdom that can't ever be shaken, as Hebrews 12 puts it.

So, you see, this really is our faith we're reading about here, all those thousands of years ago, in Abraham's story. It's real Christian faith, in an eternal homeland, in a heavenly city, in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 46] And that's why, of course, Paul writes to the Romans and said, these things are written for us, that through the encouragement of Scripture, we might also have hope, as they did.

We're to read these chapters, and we're to understand God's wonderful faithfulness to Abraham. And we also, we also, who are people who have made great strides, out of darkness, into the true faith, and yet, and yet, who, like Abraham, also are all too conscious of our own stumblings, that we also, who both stride and stumble in the faith, we also might have hope.

And I don't know about you, but I, for one, need that. And I rejoice very, very much, in this second half of Genesis chapter 12, just because I know that I am a stumbler, just like Abraham.

And I rejoice to know that, because I share Abraham's faith, I also share Abraham's God. I'm sure there are some others, like me this morning, that feel the same way.

So I want to look at this passage, which is all about Abraham the patriarch's first stumblings of fear, in total contrast to what we saw last week, in the first part of the chapter, which was all about Abraham the pagan's great strides of faith.

[11 : 07] And I want us to see just how realistic the Bible is, and how realistic God is, and how thankful we must be that it is so.

Because this passage reminds us that it's not just an example that we're to follow when we're looking at somebody like Abraham. Follow Abraham. There's far, far more to this story of Abraham than that.

In fact, today, it's an example, isn't it, of what not to do. You see, there's no hope for us in just following the example of a man like Abraham. But of course, there is great hope for us in trusting Abraham's God.

And above all, seeing how his great grace and mercy and faithfulness to this pagan convert is played out. This man who left his old life behind, who set out with God, who wanted to give everything to God and for God, and yet, is still a human being full of all kinds of weaknesses and prone to stumble.

Do you know anyone like that? Anyone who's set out to stride in faith, to follow God, and yet is still very human, very full of weaknesses and stumblings. Do you know anybody like that?

[12 : 21] Maybe I should say, do you know anybody who's not like that? What is it? The Apostle James says, we all stumble in many ways. Well, that's right, isn't it?

So thank God then, for the encouragement and hope that he has given us in not just telling us about Abraham's strides of faith, but also telling us about what many, many a new believer finds all too soon in their lives, the first stumblings of fear.

So we're going to look at this under two headings, Abraham's wobble of fear, and then God's work of correction. And as I said, if you look in the bulletin, I've shown you there, the deliberate symmetry that just shows us how carefully Moses has written this and how purposefully he's given us this whole story, not just showing us the bit that shows Abraham in a good light.

You see, the Bible is a great believer in the Freedom of Information Act. Unlike some of our politicians these days who seem to be wanting to repeal it very quickly. The Bible always tells the truth.

It tells the whole truth. It tells nothing but the truth. Warts and all. And that's why it can help real people. Isn't that right? Like you and me. It's so real because God is so real.

[13 : 34] And he wants us as Christians to be real about ourselves and about one another. Look first then at verses 10 to 16. I'm calling this section Abraham's disobedient wobble of fear.

And it's a bit of a shock, isn't it? When you first read this story, hard on the heels of that great high point of the first half of the chapter. Because really, in a way, one of the things that we can't help wondering when we get to that momentous word in chapter 12, verses 1 to 3, one of the things we can't help wondering is whether at last this man is going to be God's promised deliverer.

The seed of the woman who's at last going to destroy forever the serpent. Destroy his curse. Wipe it out and change the world. That's what we've been looking for, isn't it?

Ever since the promises, Genesis 3, verse 15. Would it be Adam and Eve's first son, Cain? Well, no, that was a total disaster, wasn't it?

And of course, that wrote Abel out of the script. What about Seth? Well, no, he died, didn't he? And all his progeny, remember chapter 5? And he died, and he died, and he died, and he died.

[14 : 45] It's not him. What about Noah? Well, in a very real way, he was a saviour of the world, wasn't he? But of course, alas, straight after the story of the flood, what do we see?

Sin rears its ugly head again in the world. It hasn't been eradicated forever. The curse is not gone. And of course, Noah himself ends up in a pickle, doesn't he?

Or rather, he pickles himself, doesn't he? So then, here we are now in this fresh start after Babel. Could it be that this man who strides out, out of paganism, into the path of God, could it be that this man is going to be the great deliverer that was promised?

It looks like that, doesn't it, when you read verses 1 to 3? Well, alas, no. At least not in the ultimate sense. Moses won't let us idolize Abraham here, will he?

His very first account of Abraham shows just how quickly this man had moved from being, well, the faithful ex-pagan to becoming nothing more than a fearful expatriate down in Egypt, leaving the land of promise, very nearly losing absolutely everything, including his wife, his vital partner in God's promise for the whole world.

[16 : 04] What is it that happens to so drastically alter Abraham's behavior in the first to the second half of this chapter? Well, I'll tell you what happens.

Something that's a very big thing in the life of any new Christian believer. The first real test of faith and trust in the God that he's come to know and to love.

Look at verse 10a, the very first half of that verse 10. It's the real hinge point, isn't it, of this whole paragraph. Now there was a famine in the land.

So here's the question. God has commanded Abraham to go to this land, to the place of blessing where his whole future and that of his progeny was to be forged.

But there's a famine in the land. So, can God be trusted to be good to his word? To be good to his promise, even in the midst of famine?

[17 : 08] That's the question. Well, it's easy, of course, for us to be smug, isn't it? But we're not usually so sure of ourselves when it's us that are at the crux point of testing like that.

Maybe you've just begun to follow the Lord Jesus, just become a Christian, and then all of a sudden something happens. You lose your jaw where some other catastrophe happens. Or a test arises because your friends react very badly and start to scorn your faith.

Or maybe it's your family that do that to you. Maybe even it's your wife or your husband. There's all kinds of things, aren't there, that can hit us very suddenly and make it seem that all the joy of that first flush of new belief, new faith, is suddenly not nearly so wonderful anymore.

Isn't that right? Maybe you are this morning. Maybe you're like Abraham, a very new believer. Maybe you're still in that first flush of joy and wonderment that comes when you first come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is wonderful. I don't want to crush that. I don't want to dampen it one little bit. Not at all. But the Bible does want us to be real, doesn't it?

[18 : 20] If you read on, actually, in Hebrews chapter 12, you'll see that it tells us very plainly that the Lord does test and discipline those that he calls to be his children just because they are his children, just because he loves them.

And no parent who loves a child will not discipline them. Well, that's what's going on right here in the story of Abraham. Some people don't agree.

Some scholars say that there's no reason at all why Abraham shouldn't have gone down to Egypt looking for food. They say it's the only sensible thing to do in the circumstances.

After all, God had not given him any specific command not to go to Egypt. But I can't agree with that for several reasons. First of all, just think. Just remember who the very first hearers of these words were going to be.

It was the Israelites, wasn't it? Under Moses. Either wandering in the desert or just about on the brink of the promised land. Can you imagine what they thought when they first heard those words in verse 10? So, Abraham went down to Egypt.

[19 : 24] You can imagine the reaction, can't you? Egypt? Egypt? What a disaster! Nothing good can come of that. That can only spell trouble. Imagine going to Egypt.

Secondly, it's true that there is no specific prohibition from God not to go to Egypt. But, God had said to Abraham very clearly, go to the land that I will show you.

And in verse 7, we're told that God appeared to Abraham in the land and said, this is the land. In other words, this is the place that you are to be, Abraham. And clearly, he's implying this is the place, not some other place.

In fact, very interestingly, if you, later on, if you look on to Genesis 26, verses 1 to 5, you'll find there when God is speaking to Isaac, he repeats the promise that he's given to Abraham.

The promise of chapter 12, verses 1 to 3. It's almost verbatim. It's exactly the same terms that God speaks about the promise to Abraham, except with the explicit addition of these words.

[20 : 30] Listen. Do not go down to Egypt. Dwell in the land, I tell you. And that's pretty plain, isn't it? God's saying something that the lawyers like to say and always put in their documents.

For the avoidance of doubt. For the avoidance of any doubt, Isaac, this land means this land and not that one, especially Egypt. You see?

He's just making very explicit what was clearly implicit in what he'd said to Abraham and what Abraham should have known and understood. But the Lord adds that in later on. A necessary negative just to make it clearer.

So I don't think there's any question that Abraham knew he was to stay in this land. But third, and perhaps most important of all, it's absolutely clear that we're meant to see this as a lapse on Abraham's part just because of the structure of the way this is written.

And that's why I've written it out for you. It's so clearly verse 10, the first half of it, is the hinge part of this whole narrative. It's constructed all around that. And that's what shows us the contrast between Abraham who in the first half went as the Lord had told him and Abraham who went down to Egypt without the Lord telling him and despite the Lord having told him that Canaan was to be the place that his home was and his destiny was.

[21 : 56] And it's all because he fails to believe and to trust God's promise to bless him and to provide for him in the land of his calling that Abraham feels the need to go foraging in Egypt.

So when he's actually put to the test when he's confronted with a real obstacle with famine as one writer puts it he steps out of the stones of God's will to find bread.

And you know when we read that about Abraham we realize how close to home it is, don't we? It really is real life. Maybe you face a famine perhaps it's financial struggles in your business.

And of course the Lord God of Heaven doesn't understand does he modern accounting and business and VAT and things like that. Well nobody else does so how could he? And you think look, I pay far too much tax already to this rotten government it's all going to the Speaker of the House of Commons for his wife's taxi fares and things like that.

And maybe I'll just massage my tax return and my VAT return. After all I can't find any specific command in the Bible that tells me not to fiddle my VAT return. There's nothing about VAT in the Bible and if there was I'm sure well I'm sure it would look leniently on my position.

[23 : 15] There's a famine my business needs it. Maybe it's a famine of decent men of marriageable potential in the Church and the Lord doesn't seem to be able does he to organize the ratios properly?

He certainly doesn't seem to be able to get them off the starting blocks nearly as quickly as some godly young women want them to and in fact need them to. Well that might be true.

And so Egypt beckons. And of course there are plenty of men in Egypt aren't there? Not believing men but a lot less feeble men it seems. In any way I'm sure I'll be able to persuade them to come to church if they want to marry me.

I'm sure I'll be able to persuade them to become a Christian if only I can get that ring on my finger. Well I've had to pick up the pieces with people after Egyptian journeyings of that sort.

And there are many others aren't there? Many, many famines that come up right in our faces as we walk in the way of faith with the Lord Jesus Christ. But you see if we won't trust God even in the face of those kind of famines we'll never learn what it is that God is really doing in our lives and with our lives and what he's preparing to do through us in our Christian lives.

[24 : 40] And that's a lesson that we've got to learn too just as Abraham did. William still put it this way we never find out why God brings us into unhappy circumstances by getting ourselves prematurely out of them.

We must wait in our plight until we see what they're for. That is faith. Anything else by whatsoever name designated is disobedience. You see fear and lack of trust in God leads us to disobedience and that's what led Abraham to disobedience.

And in his story here we can see things go from bad to worse until he ends up having lost his wife his key partner in God's purpose for his blessing to the world. It's a catastrophe.

Now we don't need to dwell on the details of the story of why Abraham acted in the way he did. Maybe he did think that anybody who wanted to approach Sarah as his sister would have to get into protracted negotiations and by the time he'd spun it all out he could be off and back to Israel again.

We don't know. But it is easy isn't it to rationalize things. To think that we've thought of all the problems and all the possibilities and all the eventualities that our actions will bring.

[25 : 54] But Abraham may have thought that but he didn't reckon on Pharaoh. And Pharaoh wasn't going to hang about. Pharaoh just does exactly what he pleases. And hey presto. Abraham snookered completely.

It's very easy for us to forget isn't it that not everything in life is under our control and all the best laid plans that we might have are getting around difficulties.

As Burns said they gang after Gly don't they? And we also friends we also forget something else or rather someone else. We have an enemy.

Don't forget that that character that we met in Genesis chapter 3 stalks ever since then in the shadows right through the story of the whole Bible. The serpent.

He's always at work. He's always says Peter prowling around looking at whom he can devour. There's enmity between his seed and the seed of faith always. And he loves to ensnare and to entice and to take away from God especially especially where there is new and real faith being born.

[27 : 03] Especially when there's great strides of advance being made in God's plan and purposes of salvation in anyone's life or in the life of a church or in the life of a mission or anything else. And that's why in any individual's life or in any church life wherever great strides for the gospel are being made that can't happen without stirring up opposition.

There's nothing fanciful in that. Just read Ephesians chapter 6 when you go home. The Bible is plain. That ancient serpent called the devil or Satan as Revelation 12 calls him.

Even now he is making war on God's people to deceive them and to lead them astray. To lead them astray through fear and through doubt in God's promises.

And that's what we face in our life of faith and that's just what Abraham faced too. And the whole mess stemmed from his wobble of fear which was a result of his failure to trust God's good and faithful promise to keep him and to protect him regardless of what might have seemed contrary to his sight and his senses.

And that's the whole point isn't it of this story. There's no point really in us getting tangled up in arguments about whether it's ever right to lie or deceive in order to save your life or save others. We can get up all sorts of blind alleys there.

[28 : 26] We can get bogged down with moralistic stories about what Abraham's specific sins were. God wants us to get to the big sin that lies behind all sins.

The root of disbelief, of failure to trust God himself. And in fact the dishonour that we do to God when we fail to trust his word like that. See, if you say something to me and I say to you, well I just don't believe you, well I'm insulting you aren't I?

I'm calling your honour and your integrity into question. And that's what we do to God, you see, when we disobey his clear commands. And just as obedience is the visible and the materialised form of faith that we can see, so disobedience and abandonment of God's command is the visible evidence of unbelief in our hearts and rejection of God's lordship over our lives.

And friends, that's what our enemy, the serpent, is desperate to do in our lives all the time. And it can be so subtle, it can be so deceptive too, can't it? And we can deceive ourselves into thinking that the action that we're taking is actually doing us great good.

See, if you look at verse 16, we could think that it makes Abraham think of himself that really all must be well, surely God's blessing him. Surely his actions have got him personal gain.

[29 : 50] Look at the flocks, the servants, look at all this great wealth. Abraham was in one sense prospering very greatly, wasn't he? In his reaction to the famine. And we also, you know, can seem to be prospering very greatly in our wrong reactions to the famines that God places in our path.

But, but says Jesus, what does it prosper a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?

See, self-preservation according to Jesus is the way of disaster, isn't it? That's what he says in Mark 8. Whoever saves his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels, he is the one who will really save it.

And you see, Abraham had to learn that lesson, didn't he? And yet instead, here, he wobbled in fear, in the disobedience of unbelief. Well, did the Lord leave him to stew in his own juice?

Well, maybe for a time, but look at verse 17. But the Lord. And that's one of the great but gods of the Bible, isn't it? Into the mess of folly and disobedience steps the covenant God with his intervention, with God's gracious work of correction in answer to his erring servant.

[31 : 19] And that's what these last verses are about, aren't they? Verse 17 to verse 1 of chapter 13. Notice there's no voice, there's nothing direct from God like before.

In fact, they knew they'd been unfaithful, but they also knew that God had been faithful despite it all to his word of promise. It's no accident when you read in Deuteronomy chapter 21 that on the very brink of the land as they're about to go in at last, Moses says to them, see the land is before you.

Go in and take possession of the land that God swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, to give it to them and to their offspring after them. Their faithful God is your God too, so take heart.

Trust him. Isn't that a great comfort to you as well today? I'm sure it is a great comfort to those who are like Abraham, who are new believers, recent ex-pagans, and for those of us who rejoice in those who are new believers and recent ex-pagans.

There can be a lot of mess, can't there, in these early days of walking with God? You know that. I know that. Lots of blunders. William still said, some people expect the Christian to grow up at once with never a stumble, which is as unreasonable as expecting him never to grow up.

[32 : 40] The man of faith makes many blunders before he finally learns that the power of mere faith in God is far stronger than the power of self, even when it's reinforced by the devil's aid.

That's true, isn't it? Sometimes there's a lot of humbling and even ignominy for us, isn't there? Who would walk the way of Abraham. But the Lord.

And he is always and still the great circumstance that changes all others. Because Abraham's God is our God too. And we should shout Hallelujah! The God of the stumbling fearful, just as the God of the striding faithful.

That's your God and mine. And his promise and purpose for blessing the whole world is not going to be stopped by the failure of this one man Abraham in his life.

Nor then is his purpose for blessing your life going to be stopped by your stumblings and failures and mess ups.

[33 : 47] It's not. What a comfort to know that God is the God of stumblers like you and me. But it is a challenge as well, isn't it, for us?

Yes, God does graciously restore Abraham. He gives him a new start. But the beginning of chapter 13 sees him right back at square one, doesn't it? The Lord is abundantly gracious in rescuing him from the follies of his disobedience.

But we mustn't ever think that that's all God ever wants for us. He doesn't just want us to just get back to first base. He wants us to go on and up. God had called Abraham, hadn't he, to be a blessing to the world.

But so far he's been quite the reverse. All that he leaves in his wake are plagues, disenchantment with him and with his God. All through this passage we've seen that there's no word from God.

There's no word to God. There's no altars being built to God. There's no appearances of God. There's no progress. There's no growth. There's no fruitfulness for God in his life.

[34 : 50] All of that's got to begin again. Now he has to begin to learn the tests that God wants him to face and all the things that will forge him into the willing servant that God wants him to be.

And friends, it's just the same with you and me, isn't it? Jesus said, you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

And that means that all of us, we need to get past just being back at first base. We need to go on to maturity with God. Because sometimes that does mean a painful humbling and rescue back to square one.

that isn't the proper place for our lives. The path of obedience from which alone God can begin to lead us on to the destiny he has for us, that's the way for us.

Maybe that is a word especially for somebody here today. You've botched it perhaps through disobedience in some area of your life. And underneath that always it's the same thing, isn't it?

[35 : 56] It's failure to believe what the true gospel really is about. A future inheritance. An eternal city. Not the treasures of this world. Not the immediacy of gain. But maybe those things have led you out of the stones of God's will to seek the easier bread of this life.

And its gold. And its glories. And its relationships. Whatever it might be. Yet God, because of his grace and mercy, has not let you go. He's corrected you.

He's brought you back to the land. Maybe, maybe like Abraham, he's had to humble you a lot along the way. It's wonderful to think that he's done that, isn't it? What a comfort. But it's a challenge, too.

He hasn't done that just so that you can drift away again. He's done it so that you can begin to learn to trust his promises. To obey his commands for your life and for your life of discipleship.

Whatever the famines he's going to place in your path. He's done it so that you can learn to begin to fulfill the destiny he has for you. To be a blessing to this world.

[37 : 03] To bear fruit for the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe that's an impossible thought for you, though. How could Abraham do that?

Well, not because of who he was. Because of who his God was and is. The God of promise and power. Abraham believed and became a blessing not because he was God's ultimate deliverer, but because God's promise was true that through him and through his line the deliverer of the Lord Jesus Christ would come.

That true seed who was the true man of faith. Utterly faithful. Utterly obedient. Who didn't turn away from the stones of God's will to seek bread when he was tempted in the desert by the evil one.

Who didn't turn aside to save himself when he hung on the cross but rather gained the victory for us. Because the Bible tells us of the joy that was set before him.

The joy of bringing many sons and daughters to glory. Every one that he has called his beloved ones his saints like Abraham like you and me who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who are heirs according to his promise.

[38 : 16] That's how God could rescue Abraham and put him on the path to fulfillment in abundance of God's destiny for him. And that's exactly how God can do that and will do that for you and for me.

Through the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ which is for us. Not just getting us back to square one by his death for our sins and taking our guilt away but also a life that is for us as his life is in us.

And his faithfulness is ours to draw on day by day and forever as we follow in his path. God brings us back and sets us at the beginning and he will lead us on all the way in the future.

There's an old hymn that sums it up perfectly and I close with it. Yield not to temptation for yielding is sin. Each victory will help you some other to win.

Fight manfully onward dark passions subdue. Look ever to Jesus. He will carry you through. Ask the Savior to help you.

[39 : 34] Comfort and strengthen and keep you. He is willing to aid you. He will carry you through. friends do that and he will.

It's another command full of promise. Well let's pray. O God our Father we thank you that you are Abraham's God and ours.

That your grace and mercy in rescuing us from the folly of our past lives and from the many stumblings and follies of our present Christian life of faith. We thank you that it is so deep and so wide.

Help us we pray to rejoice even in your painful rescues and corrections and help us we pray to put our hand in yours as we face every obstacle that you place in our paths and that in doing so we like Abraham may know more of your graciousness and more of your certain trustworthiness and that in doing so we might glorify you forever.

Amen.